1. What is Phenomenology?

- Introduction
  - Course Outline
  - The Phenomenology of Perception
- Husserl and Phenomenology
- Merleau-Ponty
- Neurophenomenology

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What is Phenomenology?

1) Subject Matter
- *Phenomena*: literally, things that appear or appearances
- ‘Phenomenal world’: the world as it appears
- Conscious experience of the world
  - Perception, Bodily Awareness, Sensation, Imagination, Memory, Emotion, Thought, etc.
- What is the *essence* of consciousness?
- Cf. psychology; ‘analytic’ philosophy of mind

2) Methodology
- Descriptive, not (causal) explanatory
  - ‘Return to the things themselves’
  - Contrast (experimental) psychology, biology...
- Provides *a priori* basis for psychology and science
- Employs technique of ‘reduction’
  - Types include: phenomenological, eidetic
Phenomenological Reduction

- Also called *epoché*
- Putting the world (as such) ‘in brackets’; suspend judgement about its existence
- Contrasts with ‘natural attitude’ of day-to-day life and science
- Compare/contrast: Descartes’s method of doubt
- Uncovers world as it appears to consciousness
- Necessary, because experience is ‘everywhere interwined with external experience, with that of extra-psychical real things’ (Husserl, p. 24a)

Eidetic Reduction

- Used to uncover essence of consciousness
  - ‘eidos’, ‘eidetic’ refer to ‘essence’
- Essence: that which makes a thing what it is
  - Standard examples (not Husserl’s): man = rational animal (Aristotle); material substance = extension (Descartes); 2 = successor of 1
- From instances to essences
  - Consider particular examples and use ‘imaginative variation’
  - Uncovers the ‘necessarily enduring invariant in the variation’ (Husserl, p. 25b)

Intentionality

- Object-directed, *not* deliberate
  - From ‘*intentio*’: literally, striving or pointing towards
  - Contrast also: intensionality (relates to meaning)
- ‘About-ness’: consciousness always consciousness of...
  - Perception of a tree; memory of a kiss; fear of the dark; thought of sitting an exam
- Brentano: intentionality the ‘mark of the mental’
  - Some controversial cases:
    - Maps, signs: intentional but not mental?
    - Pain, emotion, mood, qualia: mental but not intentional?
- Consciousness has an *act-object* structure
2) Intentional act

- Modes of consciousness: perceiving (seeing, hearing, touching, etc.), remembering, imagining, etc.
- Different modes of awareness (each intentional) are ‘synthetically unified’ in consciousness of an object
- Example: individual experiences of different appearances presented by a die, depending on orientation, depth, illumination, etc.
- In general: noesis; noetic refers to noesis

Transcendental Idealism

‘I-subject’, ‘I-pole’, or transcendental Ego

- Transcend: literally, to go beyond
- Ego exists independently of temporal/causal world...
- ...and prior to the world; ‘constituting consciousness’
  - Condition of the possibility of objective experience: nature of the perceived world determined by the transcendental Ego and its essential ‘structures’
  - ‘I must lose the world by epoché, in order to regain it by a universal self-examination. “Do not wish to go out,” says Augustine, “go back into yourself. Truth dwells in the inner man.”’ (Cartesian Meditations, 1931, §64)

Merleau-Ponty

- Influenced by later Husserl, e.g. Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology (1936)
  - First system account of phenomenology in Ideas (1913); developed subsequently...
  - Encyclopaedia Brittanica entry (1927); Cartesian Meditations (1929, published 1931)
  - Later introduced Lebenswelt (‘lived-world’); possibly response to Heidegger’s Being and Time (Sein und Zeit, 1927)
- Q: What is Merleau-Ponty’s relation to Husserl and phenomenology?
Merleau-Ponty

- Transcendental Idealism
  - Rejects transcendental idealism of early, and perhaps late, Husserl
  - “Truth does not “inhabit” only the “inner man”, or more accurately, there is no inner man, man is in the world, and only in the world does he know himself” (PP, p. xii)

Merleau-Ponty

- Being-in-the-world
  - Similar to (late) Husserl’s Lebenswelt (‘life-world’) and Heidegger’s being-in-the-world
  - Subject and world are ‘intertwined’
  - Perceiving more ‘primitive’ than thought; ‘operative intentionality’ (vs. intentionality of act)
  - Lived-world indeterminate, ambiguous, opaque
  - Experience essential meaningful
    - We are ‘condemned to meaning’ (p. xxii)
    - (Cf. Sartre, ‘we are condemned to be free’)

Merleau-Ponty

- Phenomenological Reduction
  - ‘places in abeyance the assertions arising out of the natural attitude’ (PP, p. vii)
  - ‘to return to the “things themselves”, is from the start a foreshewing of science’ (PP, p. ix)
  - ‘The most important lesson which the reduction teaches us is the impossibility of a complete reduction’ (PP, p. xv)
  - Existential, not transcendental, phenomenology

- Eidetic reduction:
  - Phenomenology ‘puts essences back into existence’ (PP, p. vii)

Neurophenomenology

Is Phenomenology Still Relevant?

- To e.g. find the neural correlates of consciousness, we first need to know what we are finding correlates of
- Careful description of experience can help interpret experimental data and influence experimental design
Neurophenomenology

Merleau-Pontyian Inspiration

- ‘To return to things themselves is to return to that world which precedes knowledge, of which knowledge always speaks, and in relation to which every scientific schematization is an abstract and derivative sign-language, as is geography in relation to the country-side in which we have learnt beforehand what a forest, a prairie or a river is’ (PP, p. x)

Selected Further Reading

Available at http://web.mac.com/cranetim/tims_website/Online_papers.html
Available at http://www.keesmith.net

An Alternative Perspective

- ‘Physics assures us that the occurrences which we call ‘perceiving objects’ are at the end of a long causal chain. We all start from ‘naïve realism’, i.e., the doctrine that things are what they seem. ...Naïve realism leads to physics, and physics, if true, shows that naïve realism is false. Therefore naïve realism, if true, is false; therefore it is false’ (B. Russell, An Inquiry into Meaning and Truth (Pelican, 1962), p. 13.)